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ABSTRACT

One aspect of the role and responsibilities of education councils in Australia is addressed in this paper: that of the council and its accountability to the community. Three major sections are presented. Part One discusses the two difficult concepts of accountability and community. The second part presents some data on how council members appear to view the relationship between their college and the community. The third section offers a number of suggestions concerning ways in which councils and council members might effectively discharge their roles in governance and their responsibilities to society. In this paper substantial use is made of data from the Regional Colleges Project, a study carried out by the Education Research Unit at the Australian National University over the period 1973-75. (Author/LBH)

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CONFERENCE ON THE ROLE OF COUNCIL IN THE GOVERNANCE
OF A COLLEGE OF ADVANCED EDUCATION

Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education
Toowoomba
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THE COUNCIL AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE COMMUNITY

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INTRODUCTION

Within a college of advanced education the council clearly occupies a key role in governance and has responsibilities of considerable magnitude. The formal powers of internal governance enjoyed by a college are vested in the council. Councils often exercise a great deal of effective power over many aspects of decision-making with the council. And they have responsibilities to governments and society not only with regard to the narrow use of financial resources but also with regard to the way the college serves different interests and the public good. In its Fourth Report the Commission on Advanced Education spoke of the role and responsibility of a council in this way:

> The council plays a leading role in the life of the college. It determines the policy of the college, having due regard to the State's overall plan for advanced education. It is responsible to the community for the wise distribution of college resources, for the identification of community needs and for the assessment of proposals for new courses or new facilities to meet those needs. The entrance policies of the college are delineated by the council and many aspects of the conditions of employment of staff are powerfully influenced by it ...[1]

Yet despite this, to date there has been surprisingly little serious writing about the roles, operations and responsibilities of college of advanced education councils in this country - or of university councils for that matter.[2] Neither has there been

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1 Commission on Advanced Education, Fourth Report on Advanced Education, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1975, p. 18.

2 The main study to date of college of advanced education councils is the author's chapters entitled 'Internal Government: College Councils and Council Members' in D.S. Anderson et al. (eds.), Regional Colleges: A Study of Non-Metropolitan Colleges of Advanced Education, Education Research Unit, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra, 1975.

The main literature on Australian university councils is R. McCaig, 'Role Perceptions of Members of University Governing Bodies', The Journal of Educational Administration, Vol. III, No. 2, October 1965; and A Report on the Conference on the Role and Responsibilities of Governing Bodies, Australian National

(continued on next page)

much serious discussion of the problems and responsibilities facing individual council members.

This paper deals with one limited aspect of the role and responsibilities of councils - that of the council and its accountability to the community - and its coverage of this aspect is by no means comprehensive. The paper falls into three parts. The first discusses the two difficult concepts of 'accountability' and 'community'. The second part presents some data on how council members appear to view the relationship between their college and the community. The third section offers a number of suggestions concerning ways in which councils and council members might effectively discharge their roles in governance and their responsibilities to society.

In this paper substantial use is made of data from the Regional Colleges Project, a study carried out by the Education Research Unit at the Australian National University over the period 1973-1975. The results of the study are reported in the publication Regional Colleges: A Study of Non-Metropolitan Colleges of Advanced Education.[3] In particular, use is made here of data from the survey of council members conducted in late 1973. Two samples of colleges were used for this survey, the first consisting

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(Footnote 2 continued)

University, Canberra, 1969. However, other literature which touches on councils includes Ruth Atkins (ed.), University Government: Proceedings of a Seminar Held in Canberra June 1965, FAUSA, Sydney, 1967; A.P. Rowe, If the Gown Fits, Melb ourne University Press, Melbourne, 1960; and J.P. Baxter and Rupert Myers, 'Administration of a Post-war University', The Australian University, Vol. 4, No. 2, July 1966.

Some important overseas literature is as follows: J.J. Corson, Governance of Colleges and Universities, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1960; R.T. Harnett, College and University Trustees: Their Backgrounds, Roles, and Educational Attitudes, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, 1969; A.D. Henderson, The Role of the Governing Board, Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1967; M. Rauh, The Trusteeship of Colleges and Universities, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1969; James Gilbert Paltridge, Julie Hurst and Anthony Morgan, Boards of Trustees: Their Decision Patterns: Report on Research, Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, University of California, Berkeley, 1973; and Graeme C. Moodie and Rowland Eustace, Power and Authority in British Universities, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1974.

3 For details on this publication see footnote 2.

of twelve regional or non-metropolitan colleges located in three different states, and the second of six colleges located in five different states. All members of council in each college in each sample were surveyed with the exception of principals (or directors and registrars (or secretaries). The survey was conducted by mail. For the regional sample the response rate was 78 per cent, while for the metropolitan sample it was 66 per cent.[4]

TWO TROUBLESOME CONCEPTS

The concepts of 'accountability' and 'community' are widely used today in education and social science literature. They are also frequently used in everyday discourse. Yet each can carry a number of different meanings, and frequently those who use them fail to make clear which precise meaning they have in mind. In addition, there are also problems with some of the meanings given to these terms. For example, particular meanings can carry with them certain assumptions which may be of questionable validity.

Accountability

Accountability is not a new concept by any means in scholarly literature. For instance, it has been used for many years in the study of public administration, political science and management. In public administration accountability means essentially responsibility - responsibility of one public servant to a senior officer, of a senior public servant to a Minister, of a Minister to the Parliament, and of a senior public servant, Minister and a government to society. But even in public administration the terms accountability and responsibility have their problems. An officer may be said to be responsible for particular functions, but seldom is it possible to spell out all these functions in detail and to say what is the relative importance of each. In many cases an officer's responsibility may have to be seen more in terms of progress towards certain goals - it is, as Spann says, 'responsibility for getting things done by others, and often very unclear about the edges'.[5] Then there are problems about in what sense a person

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4 Greater detail on this survey is given in Anderson, Regional Colleges, Vol. 2, pp. 574-578.

5 R.N. Spann, Public Administration in Australia, Government Printer of New South Wales, Sydney, 1973, p. 67.

can be said to be responsible. A simple meaning might be that one is accountable to, and blamed (at least) by a superior if some result is not achieved or some rule is not followed. But though this does happen, its incidence is uncertain. Spann writes:

> Some activities which have very low priority in the total spectrum of responsibilities may be much more visible to superiors than others, and their non-performance is far more likely to attract unfavourable attention. For example, if certain returns are wrong or late, this may attract blame, though more important forms of misbehaviour will remain unnoticed.[6]

Responsibility or accountability are also used in public administration in a more subjective way, to indicate those persons, institutions and norms to which a public servant feels responsible.

Notions about accountability go back a long way in education and in the study of education. In early New South Wales, for instance, the colonial governors took pains to ensure that the colony's money for schools was being spent as efficiently and economically as possible, and saw themselves as accountable for the schools not only to the colonial office but also to the church and to children.[7] But over the last few years within education accountability as a term has come to great prominence, and today it is bandied about by educators and non-educators alike. Largely from the U.S. there has come a rapidly burgeoning literature on accountability, and in this literature accountability is used in a variety of ways. Some authors assert that the provision of information on the performance of schools constitutes accountability - and sometimes they would hold teachers directly responsible for such functions as improving mathematics and reading scores of children in their classes. Others see accountability as a matter of redesigning the structures by which education is governed. In some cases accountability is defined as a specific approach to education such as performance contracting or educational vouchers, while in others accountability

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6 Ibid.

7 W.G. Walker, 'What on Earth is Accountability?', paper presented at Conference on Accountability, Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, Toowoomba, November 1973, pp. 11-12.

is referred to as part of all educational systems.[8] In the U.S. it is common to hear of statewide testing programmes as well as recent legislation which would enable schools to terminate the appointments of 'poor' teachers being explained as responses to the need for accountability.

This recent educational literature on accountability gives little help to a discussion about the accountability of college councils. This is partly because it refers mainly to schools and the performance of teachers and administrators, partly because it is relating to American phenomena, and partly because it demands the scientific measurement of many human outcomes that are not quantifiable. In my view when discussing higher education in Australia it is more sensible to rely on a more traditional view of accountability. Thus, for this paper, I would define accountability simply as the condition of being accountable, liable or responsible. A college council is delegated considerable powers and also resources, both human and financial, of considerable magnitude. But in return it is responsible and answerable for its use of these, both in a legal sense and in some respects, a moral sense too. A college council is accountable in much the same way as the board of any public authority or statutory corporation is accountable, except that by tradition tertiary institutions are supposed to enjoy a greater measure of independence and autonomy.

This now brings us to the question: for what is a council accountable? I suggest that a council is accountable for many aspects of college governance and functions, though the sense in which it is accountable varies from aspect to aspect. First, a council is responsible to ensure that the college operates within the formal, legal framework provided by legislation and government regulation. For example, in Queensland a council must among other things, co-operate with state authorities to provide courses and programmes to meet local and state needs, submit financial submissions as required to the Advanced Education Board and approve expenditure within funds allocated by the board, delegate powers to the college principal,

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8 For a good discussion of characteristics of this U.S. literature on accountability, see Henry M. Levin, 'A Conceptual Framework for Accountability in Education', School Review, Vol. 82, May 1974, pp. 363-91.

submit all by-laws for state approval, and have the Advanced Education Board approve annual budgets. Second, there is simple accountability for the actual expenditure of funds and the procedures by which that expenditure is accounted for. This includes responsibility for the detail on such items as vouchers, time sheets and purchase orders, and responsibility in terms of the accounting conventions and reporting procedures which demonstrate the propriety and legitimacy of expenditures with the institution. Third, a council is accountable in broad terms for the goals set by the college, for the academic and policies followed, and for the results achieved. This can be explained in another way as accountability in terms of efficiency (defined in terms of the organisation's capacity to achieve results with a given expenditure of resources) and in terms of effectiveness (defined as the degree of success an organisation enjoys in doing whatever it is trying to do).[9] It is a combination of our second and third kinds of accountability that governments often appear to have in mind. In 1961, in announcing the appointment of the Martin Committee, Sir Robert Menzies stressed the increasing resource demands on tertiary education and went on:

> ... the rapidly increasing number of students who may wish to take advantage of tertiary education, and other factors such as student wastage, staff shortage and the pressure of universities generally, make it imperative that we investigate the best way of making the most efficient use of available potential resources.[10]

Two additional points need to be made before leaving accountability. First, the sense in which a council is accountable, or can be called on to give explanation, varies somewhat between its different areas of responsibility. For instance, a council is responsible for financial management in a somewhat different sense to what is responsible for the college's academic goals. On the first it is generally clear whether rules have been followed, but on the second, it is much more a matter of judgement, of taste and of whether key constituencies are happy with the college or not. Second, while

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9 For a discussion of these terms see J. Cutt, 'Planning - Programming - Budgeting Systems in Tertiary Education', unpublished paper, Canberra, 1976.

10 Tertiary Education in Australia, Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, Vol. 1, p. 225.

a council has great responsibilities, this is not to say that it alone is responsible for what happens in the college. Rather the principal, the senior administrative staff, and the whole academic staff and support staff are in different ways accountable too. Perhaps we should add to this list the students - for today to provide a student with advanced education involves the expenditure of hundreds of dollars per year, and apart from this many students enjoy a living allowance from the public purse.

Community

The concept of 'community' is probably as troublesome in education and the social sciences as the concept of accountability. In discussions about tertiary institutions we frequently use the word community - 'a college should be responsive to community needs'; 'college and community should interact'; 'a council above all is responsible to the community'. But often we do little to give clues about what we mean by community.

In discussions about colleges of advanced education I suggest the term community is used often to mean one or a combination of the following:

a) society at large or the public interest;
b) the local community surrounding the college, i.e. community in a geographic sense;
c) industry, commerce and employers;
d) the professions and employees seeking additional skills;
e) school leavers seeking further education;
f) churches, social, cultural and political organisations;
g) the individual interested in some particular study for its own sake or to satisfy some personal need;
h) disadvantaged groups in society, particularly those not well represented in higher education at present;
i) governments or government departments, parliaments.

In this paper I will use the term primarily to mean the public interest, but also I will use it to incorporate the idea of particular publics including the local community around a college with an interest in the college. I will not, however, use the term to mean governments or advanced education boards.

Apart from confusion about usage, there are problems about hid en assumptions. For example, many people who talk of colleges responding to community needs and demands and of close interaction between college and community appear to hold a consensus view of society. Overall, it is assumed, people want the same things from the college, and all the college really has to do is to find out what these things are. Some, however, would say that in certain cases a conflict view of society is more realistic - that a college serves different constituencies, each with its own goals. These goals represent the expectations of particular groups for the college. With limited resources a college cannot satisfy all expectations, and apart from this the goals of some groups are diametrically opposed to the goals of others.

HOW COUNCIL MEMBERS VIEW THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COLLEGE AND LOCAL COMMUNITY

One function a college council is supposed to fulfil is to provide a link between the college and its local geographic community. In our survey of council members we asked respondents specifically in open-ended questions first about the contributions that their colleges make to the local community, and second whether they thought there were any ways in which the relationship between college and community could be strengthened.

On the first of these questions 93 per cent of regional respondents and 85 per cent of metropolitan respondents gave at least one comment. This suggests that in both regional and metropolitan colleges council members think readily in terms of their college contributing to the local community, but in regional colleges the idea of a college contributing to the local community is even stronger. Among regional respondents, the main contributions in rank order were seen to be educational, social and cultural, and economic. Among metropolitan respondents, two main contributions were seen, first educational and second, social and cultural. Some metropolitan respondents mentioned an economic contribution, but only 10 per cent listed this as their first comment compared to 20 per cent of regional respondents who listed an economic contribution first.

On the second question again most respondents gave at least one comment, although the proportion of regional respondents who replied

was higher than that for metropolitan respondents (93 per cent regional, 86 per cent metropolitan). Responses are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

Topics mentioned by respondents in reply to question: 'Is there any way in which the relationship between the college and the local community could be strengthened' (percentages)

	Regional			Metropolitan		
	CAE	TC	All	CAE	TC	All
1st answer						
Better communications	42	26	38	55	25	48
Services	21	37	24	25	42	29
Facilities	7	7	7	4	25	9
College government	9	11	10	5	-	4
No change	16	19	17	4	8	5
Other	5	-	4	7	-	3
	100	100	100	100	100	100
2nd answer						
Better communications	34	17	32	50	56	52
Services	41	58	43	36	33	35
Facilities	11	8	10	5	11	6
College government	14	17	15	9	-	7
	100	100	100	100	100	100

For both samples the message that comes through is clear: council members wish to see more effective communication between the college and community (for example, better college public relations, community being made aware of services the college offers, more mixing between college students and staff on one hand and members of the local community on the other), and better services (for example, greater variety of courses, courses designed to meet problems and needs of the area, better facilities for continuing education, more college involvement in community projects, college assistance to local industry, and more in the way of part-time and off-campus courses).

The following are a fairly representative selection of comments relating to these two topics from respondents in regional colleges.

Headmistress independent school, regional teachers college:

Publicity could be given to community aid projects. More frequent plays etc. to which community invited.

General manager division state railways, regional multi-school college:

The relationship is good here because of a long standing arrangement for bursary presentations from the local community which occupies a portion of the graduation day ceremonies.

Head of college department, regional multi-school college:

Better choice of local representatives on council. More funds and staff for community liaison.

Senior lecturer at college, regional teachers college:

By having buildings and resources that the community can more readily use and by using community resources more fully.

Senior public servant in a state capital, regional multi-school college:

More open day functions to provide community awareness of the college and all it stands for.

Housewife, regional multi-school college:

A centre for creative and performing arts with public participation - more use of local expertise in practical work.

Managing director of group of companies, regional multi-school college:

Yes probably with a wider representation on the council and through the arts which are now becoming established parts of the courses.

Manager (engineer), regional multi-school college:

This requires good understanding of community situations. It presently enjoys good reputation. Being aware of needs and filling these, especially in cultural areas, can strengthen this.

Research scientist, regional multi-school college:

Various means of contact are established. The problem is subtle. Involvement in further education, adult education, and acting as a community facility for cultural and intellectual activities.

Dental surgeon, regional multi-school college:

Widening of course offerings to encompass more areas, wider community appeal. More activity at employers level to increase local job opportunities for graduates.

SUGGESTIONS FOR COUNCIL MEMBERS

How can council members best discharge their responsibilities to the community in its different senses. There are no easy answers, but I would offer some suggestions for consideration. These suggestions are not meant to imply criticism of the performance of college councils today. Overall I consider that colleges have done extremely well in recruiting council members with varied expertise and considerable experience in different areas that bear directly on the work of colleges. I also recognise that lay council members cannot be expected to give unlimited time to their college. Most of them are extremely busy people, occupying senior positions in government, industry, or the professions. Further, in our survey of council members I was most surprised to discover how much time council members already give to their colleges; almost 75 per cent give 10 hours or more a month to college business (and of these many give much more), while most make from three to five visits per month to the college.

My suggestions to council members are as follows:

1. Be well-informed

Although many college councils tend to concentrate their attention on financial and administrative matters, they are often called on to make decisions on or pass judgement on the recommendations of academic staff on matters which are largely educational. Council members who have made some effort to become reasonably well-informed about higher education and current issues in higher education are obviously in a much better position to make useful contributions to discussions on such matters and wise decisions.

Most council members seem to think they have a reasonable grasp of the main issues and problems in Australian higher education, or at least that they are as well informed on these matters as most other council members. In our survey in both samples approximately 60 per cent of respondents said that compared with other members of their college council they were either very well acquainted or moderately well acquainted with the main developments and problems of higher education. In both regional and metropolitan samples another 20 to 30 per cent said their acquaintance was average.

Yet college principals we interviewed in both regional and metropolitan colleges generally expressed some degree of concern

about the lack of background and knowledge among council members with regard to broad policy questions in higher education. This seemed to be a particular concern of principals of colleges which had only recently acquired a council. Admittedly, some principals were less concerned than others, and most pointed out that there were some people on their councils with wide knowledge in the area of higher education and also that most council members who did not have a wide knowledge in higher education had special competence in other areas. But at the same time, most principals confessed that they had developed various procedures to help council members to become better acquainted with the broad issues of higher education policies. For example, many produce papers on special topics, or circulate copies of new reports or books. Others deliberately try to spend as much time as possible with individual council members discussing general policy questions.

To some extent this concern of college principals about council members seems justified. Certainly many council members appear to spend little time in reading key reports or books on higher education. In our survey we presented respondents with a list of key reports on advanced education and some of the best known recent books on advanced and higher education, and asked them to indicate the extent of their familiarity with each. Responses are summarised in Table 2. Less than 50 per cent had read at least part of the Third Report of the Commission on Advanced Education. At the time of the survey this was the key official document setting out current national policy on advanced education, and giving details on the financial allocations to each college for the 1972-1975 triennium. It had been freely available for twelve months. Less than 30 per cent had read the Cohen report on teacher education, and less than 25 per cent had read any of the key books we listed on higher education. Even in the teachers colleges, less than 50 per cent of council members for the two samples combined had read at least part of the Cohen report, and in the one agricultural college with its own council only 40 per cent of council members had read the book, Consensus and Conflict in Agrkcultural Education, despite the fact that this book reports on a research study of selected agricultural colleges including that one.

Table 2

Extent of council members' familiarity with selected reports and books on Australian higher education (percentages for both samples combined)

	Never heard of it	Heard of it	Heard of it and generally aware of main points	Have read at least part of it	Have studied carefully
Australian Commission on Advanced Education: Third Report 1973-1975, 1972 (Chairman: T.B. Swanson)	6	18	27	31	18
Australian Commission on Advanced Education: Teacher Education 1973-75: Report of the Special Committee on Teacher Education, 1973 (Chairman: S.W. Cohen)	21	30	21	15	13
D.J. Golding et al. (eds.), Challenges Facing Advanced Education Warburton Conference 1970, 1970	38	26	12	15	9
R.J. Brown, Some Aspects of Post-Secondary Education in Australia, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1971	57	29	6	7	1
E.L. Wheelwright (ed.) Tertiary Education in Australia, 1965	53	22	10	11	4
G.S. Harman and C. Selby Smith (eds.), Australian Higher Education: Problems in a Developing System, 1972	46	28	12	7	7
Consensus and Conflict in Agricultural Education, 1973	81	9	3	3	4

It should be pointed out that the book authored by Brown in the list of books is a fictitious title. It was deliberately inserted in order to help test the reliability of information given on this question by respondents.

Although college council members are not as well read in the field of higher education as we might wish, or even expect, it is

important to note that they appear to be no less well read than American college and university trustees. Hartnett reports that his data indicate that as a group trustees are barely familiar with the major books and periodicals relevant to American higher education. He writes:

> In terms of books, for example, only Ruml and Morrison's Memo to a College Trustee - a book now some nine years old - has been read completely by more than ten per cent of the trustees. In fact, of the fifteen books listed [in the questionnaire], only four have been completely read by more than five per cent of the trustees, and, in most cases, the trustees have never even heard of the books, most of which are now regarded as 'classics' in the higher education field.[11]

This comparison raises the issue of what familiarity with higher education literature we might reasonably expect Australian CAE council members to have. Undoubtedly lay council members are in the main busy people, who have considerable expertise in other fields. At the same time colleges could possibly do more to ensure that their lay council members are kept abreast with current thinking. Of course, this assumes that councils should be more than rubber stamps and that they should participate in making key decisions for the college in areas other than those that are purely concerned with budgets and administration.

2. Try to understand academics

It is not surprising that council members sometimes find academics and their ways hard to understand. Colleges and universities operate differently to government departments or business corporations, and academics' values often differ significantly from the values of other occupational groups enjoying similar salaries and work autonomy. The extent to which college academics differ in their political orientations from college council members and others is brought out in Table 3. Council members and academic staff in our surveys were asked to indicate where they saw themselves politically on a nine-

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11 Rodney T. Hartnett, 'College and University Trustees: Their Backgrounds, Roles, and Educational Attitudes' in Carlos E. Kruytbosch and Sheldon L. Messinger (eds.), The State of the University: Authority and Change, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, 1970, p. 63.

Table 3

Position on political spectrum
(percentages)

	Left	Centre	Right	Total
All council members				
Regional	25	32	43	100
Metropolitan	32	42	26	100
Lay council members				
Regional	16	35	49	100
Metropolitan	31	38	31	100
Academic staff				
Regional	42	43	15	100
Metropolitan	37	43	20	100
Australian electorate	10	56	34	100

Note: The data for academic staff are from the academic staff survey, and for the Australian electorate from a survey of a national sample of Australian electors conducted in 1967 as part of the Australian Survey Project, Department of Political Science, RSSS, ANU.

point scale running from far left to far right. The data show that council members generally are considerably more conservative than college academics but somewhat more to the left than the Australian electorate as a whole. However, lay council members are much more conservative than their college student and college academic staff fellow members, and their orientation conforms reasonably closely to that for the electorate as a whole. The difference in political orientation between lay council members and college academics is striking, especially in regional colleges. Academic staff in regional colleges tend to be further to the left than those in metropolitan colleges, yet lay council members in regional colleges are even more conservative than those in metropolitan colleges. Note especially that in regional colleges only 16 per cent of lay council members compared to 42 per cent of academic staff is left

in orientation, while 49 per cent of lay council members compared to 15 per cent of academic staff is right. With such a gap in orientations between these two groups, then, it is not surprising that academics have some concern about lay council members. Neither is it surprising that there is sometimes disagreement over basic educational matters, for political orientation is often closely tied to ideas about social policy in various areas including education.

For councils to operate effectively then council members need to have some understanding of academics and their values. At the same time, of course, we would hope that many academics would do more to appreciate the viewpoint of those outside the academy.

3. Work to ensure that different community viewpoints are heard and understood

Colleges often speak a lot about responsiveness to community needs and demands, and about close relationships between college and community. Yet one often has the feeling that in some cases very little is being done by a college to explore what various interests in the surrounding society see as their educational needs, and how the college might meet them.

Possibly council members could encourage more serious study of local communities by colleges. Perhaps they could do something to bring spokesmen for interests and college administrators and academic staff into useful discussions. Perhaps they could take up the cause of some groups whose needs are not well represented at present. This might involve looking at the present balance of lay representation on councils. In our survey we found that lay council members are predominantly male, tertiary educated, over 40 years of age, drawn from the universities, the professions or public service, and with incomes well above those of most occupational groups in society.

4. Be a defender of the college

An important function for a council is to protect the institution's autonomy, and to safeguard academic freedom and the college as a place of free inquiry. Colleges will only be lively intellectual places performing the functions society demands of them if there are places where academics can pursue knowledge and exchange ideas freely. Yet there are many forces in society which would attempt to reduce college autonomy. A council can be quite an important buffer between

community and government on the one hand, and academic life on the other. In universities throughout the western world this function of governing boards and councils is often highlighted as being of special importance. One American scholar has said that the prime responsibility of any university governing board is 'to protect the institution from the wrath of groups which would destroy it' and 'to guard zealously the privilege of objective search and responsible advocacy in our society'.[12]

5. Encourage the council not to be pre-occupied with administration detail

In a recent U.S. study of decision-making by university and college boards, Paltridge found that many boards are pre-occupied with detailed operational matters and that as a consequence they have little time to spend in discussing fundamental issues of policy or in long-term planning. He reports that he found

> ... boards undertake a tremendous volume of decision actions in the course of a year's meetings, and much of this volume is in the form of pro-forma actions on long lists of operational matters. The responsibility for legislative policy formation, long term planning, administrative guidance, review of performance, and support of the institution as it faces hostile critics from within and without the campus are frequently given minor attention or left to the initiative of administrators or government agencies.[13]

I suspect much the same might be true of Australian colleges and universities. By encouraging greater administrative delegation and attention to planning and key questions of policy a council member could make an important contribution to his college.

6. Be an effective bridge between college and community

One key function for the lay council members is to provide understandings and links between college and society. In some senses they are representatives of society able in some way to certify as plain men that all is reasonable in the 'ivory tower'. They listen

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12 Algo D. Henderson, 'The Role of the Governing Board' in J. Victor Baldridge (ed.), Academic Governance: Research on Institutional Politics and Decision Making, McCutchan, Berkeley, 1971, p. 108.

13 Paltridge, p. v.

to the proposals of administrators and academics, and it is their function to question and to say whether such proposals sound self-consistent and reasonable. Being laymen, the college community can articulate its assumptions and explain its plans in ordinary language; this alone is a valuable exercise. Moreover, the lay council member performs this service in the knowledge that he has real responsibility; he knows that if things go wrong he may have to defend what has been done to the outside world. The layman endorses the judgement of the academic community and validates it as an act of the college.

7. Give encouragement

In recent months, I have visited higher education institutions in a number of countries, and in most cases the outlook for the next few years is far from bright. Budgets are being cut, enrolments are stationery or falling, there are few academic vacancies for new Ph.D.s and in some cases academic staff are losing their jobs.

In Australia the situation is still significantly better than in many other comparable societies. Yet it does seem likely that we may have some difficult months ahead. Possibly council members can help by being good listeners and by encouraging rather despondent administrators and academics. Understandably administrators and academics used to regular growth find a steady state situation frustrating and depressing. Yet even in such a situation it offers possibilities, such as the chance to undertake thorough reviews of existing programmes and to plan in a more unhurried fashion.